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UNCTAD XIV Youth Forum: Ministerial segment

Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. Under the theme of "Shaping the world we want", UNCTAD held for the first time a Youth Forum of which the highlight was a ministerial segment, a high-level event that took place on 21 July 2016. More than 250 students and young professionals between the ages of 18 and 30 coming from over 70 countries participated.

2. The panellists for the ministerial segment were the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, the Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs of Kenya, the Chief Executive Officer of Safaricom and the Envoy on Youth of the United Nations Secretary-General. The panel discussion was moderated by the Kenyan activist and Director of Investments for the Governance and Citizen Engagement Initiative in Africa of the Omidyar Network.

3. The moderator introduced the youth and their work during the Youth Forum. She then invited the youth to take the floor and present the Youth Forum Declaration on which they had been working online and in person over recent months. The Declaration was closely linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and covered access to and quality of education, decent jobs and youth unemployment, and State accountability.*

4. Following the presentation of the Declaration, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD made remarks, touching on UNCTAD being at the head of the curve in youth inclusion and youth needing an opportunity to become champions of multilateralism. UNCTAD, institutionally, was dealing with the consideration of "walking the talk" of inclusivity, since those making the decisions today would not be available to be held accountable in 2030. There was therefore a need to engage those who would be at the centre of the world in 2030 and whose problems were universal.

5. By bringing youth to Nairobi, UNCTAD hoped to further prepare them for the upcoming challenges, including on multilateralism and the need to enhance the UNCTAD

* For the Youth Forum Declaration, see document TD/517.

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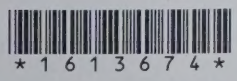

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mandate. The youth of today needed to have an opportunity to see the value of international solidarity.

6. The panel discussion then began with the first panellist, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands. She recognized the leadership of UNCTAD in not talking about but, rather, talking together with youth and referred to the challenges of youth. Some of those challenges were, for instance, youth unemployment, a universal problem, and the critical role education played in what youth learned and links to the knowledge and skills expected when they entered the job market.

7. She closed by mentioning illicit financial flows and that the Netherlands was the only country worldwide offering to renegotiate all its existing tax treaties with developing countries and provide capacity-building support to their national tax authorities.

8. The Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs of Kenya also highlighted the universality of challenges that youth faced. Youth were at present at the centre of the conversation, with 2017 earmarked as the year of the youth under the framework of the African Union. She noted that, in the case of Kenya, the vision concerning youth remained low. Youth should make known what their needs are and their space should be increased through the creation of monitoring frameworks on best practices in which they can actively participate. As market access goes beyond borders, the United Nations is the correct channel through which youth related conversations should be held and she commended UNCTAD on this first initiative of a youth forum in Nairobi.

9. The Chief Executive Officer of Safaricom referred to the topic of debt and the need for youth to hold Governments and private businesses to account with the aim of not overburdening youth with debt in the future. He highlighted that the current trend on debt was not good. He also advised youth to be inclusive and not to leave those living in rural areas behind, giving as an example the Kenyan youth who could not access the Youth Forum.

10. The Envoy on Youth of the United Nations Secretary-General stated that UNCTAD was unique in that it was convened around seizing opportunities, while most other United Nations and other processes were convened around the idea of challenges and problems. He urged a focus on what was most important, which was reaching out to people and discussing how to make people's lives better. He built on the notion of taking the conversation from creating more jobs, to creating decent jobs and unlocking the potential of young people, and referred to stagnation of wages and unemployment, as well as the generation of the absence of jobs. He also noted the high levels of early demise of fledgling small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa as well as the need for coaching and learning. Finally, he concluded that the Youth Forum should not be considered as a side event and should be reflected in the main Conference, including the Youth Forum Declaration.

11. The panel discussion closed after questions to the panellists from youth and concluding that youth should be at the centre of the conversation.

12. Towards the end of the high-level event, the Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kenya, in her capacity as the President of the fourteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XIV), was handed artwork prepared by one of the youth participants as a token of gratitude for the hospitality that youth had received in Nairobi. The President of UNCTAD XIV responded positively to the request by youth to take their messages forward and work closely with them. She said that the Youth Forum Declaration was going to be considered a part of UNCTAD XIV. She expected to continuously find passion, commitment and energy from the youth, noting that youth were both the present and the future.

13. The high-level event concluded with a performance of the song by the Kenyan musical group Elani that had been composed specifically for the UNCTAD Youth Forum. Youth sang and danced with the group, who commended them and called on them to continue the conversation after leaving Nairobi, going beyond borders and seeking information from like-minded people.

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